

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

WSG 37A

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Policy on Publicizing Enforcement Activities

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TO: Assistant Administrators  
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(Headquarters and Regions I-X)  
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Attached is the EPA Policy on Publicizing Enforcement Activities, a joint project of the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Monitoring and the Office of Public Affairs. The document establishes EPA policy on informing the public about Agency enforcement activities. The goal of the policy is to improve communication with the public and the regulated community regarding the Agency's enforcement program, and to encourage compliance with environmental laws through consistent public outreach among headquarters and regional offices.

To implement this policy, national program managers and public affairs directors should review the policy for the purpose of preparing program-specific procedures which appropriate. Further, program managers should consider reviewing the implementation of this policy in EPA Regional Offices during their regional program reviews. These follow-up measures should ensure that publicity of enforcement activities will constitute a key element of the Agency's program to deter environmental noncompliance.

Attachment

## EPA POLICY ON PUBLICIZING ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

I. PURPOSE

This memorandum establishes EPA policy on informing the public about Agency enforcement activities. This policy is intended to improve EPA communication with the public and the regulated community regarding the goals and activities of the Agency's enforcement program. Appropriate publication of EPA enforcement efforts will both encourage compliance and serve as a deterrent to noncompliance. The policy provides for consistent public outreach among headquarters and regional offices.

II. STATEMENT OF POLICY

It is the policy of EPA to use the publicity of enforcement activities as a key element of the Agency's program to deter noncompliance with environmental laws and regulations. Publicizing Agency enforcement activities on an active and timely basis informs both the public and the regulated community about EPA's efforts to promote compliance.

Press releases should be issued for judicial and administrative enforcement actions, including settlements and successful rulings and other significant enforcement program activities. Further, the Agency should consider employing a range of methods of publicity such as press conferences and informal press briefings, articles, prepared statements, interviews and appearances at seminars by knowledgeable and authorized representatives of the Agency to inform the public of these activities. EPA will work closely with the states in developing publicity on joint enforcement activities and in supporting State enforcement efforts.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICYA. When to Use Press Releases<sup>1</sup>1. Individual Cases

It is EPA policy to issue press releases when the Agency: (1) files a judicial action or issues a major administrative order or complaint (including a notice of proposed contractor listing and the administrative decision to list); (2) enters into a major judicial or administrative

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1 The term "press release" includes the traditional Agency press release, press advisories, notes to correspondents and press statements. The decision on what method should be used in a given situation must be coordinated with the appropriate public affairs office(s).

consent decree or files a motion to enforce such a decree; or (3) receives a successful court ruling. In determining whether to issue a press release, EPA personnel will consider: (1) the amount of the proposed or assessed penalty (e.g., greater than \$25,000); (2) the significance of the relief sought or required in the case, and its public health or environmental impact; (3) whether the case would create national or program precedence; and (4) whether unique relief is sought. However, even enforcement actions that do not meet these criteria may be appropriate for local publicity in the area where the violative conduct occurred. Where appropriate, a single press release may be issued which covers a group or category of similar violations.

Where possible, press release should mention the environmental result desired or achieved by EPA's action. For example, where EPA determines that a particular enforcement action resulted (or will result) in an improvement in a stream's water quality, the press release should note such results. In addition, press releases must include the penalty agreed to in settlement or ordered by a court.

Press releases can also be used to build better relationships with the states, the regulated community, and environmental groups. To this end, EPA should acknowledge efforts by outside groups to foster compliance. For example, where a group supports EPA enforcement efforts by helping to expedite the cleanup of Superfund site, EPA may express its support for such initiatives by issuing a press release, issuing a statement jointly with the group, or conducting a joint press conference.

## 2. Major Policies

In addition to publicizing individual enforcement cases, EPA should publicize major enforcement policy statements and other enforcement program activities since knowledge of Agency policies by the regulated community can deter future violations. Such publicity may include the use of articles and other prepared statements on enforcement subjects of current interest.

## 3. Program Performance

Headquarters and regional offices should consider issuing quarterly and annual reports on Agency enforcement efforts. Such summaries present an overview of the Agency's and Regions' enforcement activities; they will allow the public to view EPA's enforcement program over time, and thus give perspective to our overall enforcement efforts. The summaries should cover trends and developments in Agency enforcement activities, and may include lists of enforcement actions filed under each statute. The Office of Enforcement and Compliance Monitoring's (OECM) Office of Compliance Analysis and Program Operations, and the Offices of Regional Counsel will assist the Public Affairs Office in this data gathering. Public Affairs Offices can also rely on the figures contained in the Strategic Planning Management System.

#### 4. Press Releases and Settlement Agreements

EPA has, on occasion, agreed not to issue a press release as part of a settlement agreement. EPA should no longer agree to a settlement which bars a press release or which restricts the content of a press release. On January 30, 1985, the Deputy Administrator issued an abbreviated press release policy, which stated in pertinent part that: "It is against EPA policy to negotiate the Agency's option to issue press releases, or the substance of press releases, with parties outside of EPA, particularly those parties involved in settlements, consent decrees or the regulatory process." This policy will help to ensure consistency in the preparation of press releases and equitable treatment of alleged violators.

##### B. Approval of Press Releases

EPA must ensure that press releases and other publicity receive high priority in all reviewing offices. By memorandum dated August 23, 1984, the Office of External Affairs directed program offices to review and comment on all press releases within two days after the Office of Public Affairs submits its draft to the program office; otherwise concurrence is assumed. This review policy extends to OECM and the Offices of Regional Counsel for enforcement-related press releases.

##### C. Coordination

#### 1. Enforcement, Program, and Public Affairs Offices

More active use of publicity requires improved coordination among Regional and Headquarters enforcement attorneys, program offices and public affairs offices. The lead office in an enforcement case, generally the regional program office in an administrative action and the Office of Regional Counsel or OECM in a judicial action, should notify the appropriate Public Affairs Office at the earliest possible time to discuss overall strategy for communicating the Agency's action (e.g., prior notice to state or local officials) and the timing of a press release. The lead office should stay in close contact with Public Affairs as the matter approaches fruition.

#### 2. Regional and Headquarters Offices of Public Affairs

Regional and headquarters Public Affairs Offices should coordinate in developing press releases both for regionally-based actions that have national implications and for nationally managed or coordinated enforcement actions.

Whenever possible, both Regional and Headquarters offices should send copies of draft press releases to their counterparts for review and comment. Both such offices should also send copies of final releases to their counterparts.

### 3. EPA and DOJ

EPA can further improve the timeliness and effectiveness of its press releases regarding judicial actions by coordinating with DOJ's Office of Public Affairs. When an EPA Office of Public Affairs decides that a press release in a judicial enforcement case is appropriate, it should notify DOJ or the appropriate U.S. Attorney's Office to ensure timeliness and consistency in preparation of press releases. DOJ has been requested to notify OECM when DOJ intends to issue a release on an EPA-related case. EPA's Office of Public Affairs will immediately review such draft releases, and, if necessary to present the Agency's position or additional information, will prepare an Agency release.

### 4. EPA and the States

Another important goal of this policy is to encourage cooperative enforcement publicity initiatives with the states. The June 26, 1984, "EPA Policy on Implementing the State/Federal Partnership in Enforcement: State/Federal Enforcement 'Agreements,'" describes key subjects that EPA should discuss with the states in forming state-EPA Enforcement Agreements. The section on "Press Releases and Public Information," states that the "Region and State should discuss opportunities for joint press releases on enforcement actions and public accounting of both State and Federal accomplishments in compliance and enforcement." Further, as discussed in the subsequent January 4, 1985, Agency guidance on "Implementing Nationally Managed or Coordinated Enforcement Actions," the timing of state and EPA releases "should be coordinated so that they are released simultaneously."

Accordingly, EPA Public Affairs Offices should consult with the relevant state agency on an EPA press release or other media event which affects the State. EPA could offer the State the option of joining in a press release or a press conference where the State has been involved in the underlying enforcement action. Further, EPA-generated press releases and public information reports should acknowledge and give credit to relevant state actions and accomplishments when appropriate.

Finally, it is requested that EPA Public Affairs Offices send the State a copy of the EPA press release on any enforcement activity arising in that state.

### D. Distribution of Press Releases

The distribution of EPA press releases is as important as their timeliness. Press releases may be distributed to the local, national, and trade press, and local and network television stations.

#### 1. Local and National Media

EPA must "direct" its press releases to ensure that the appropriate geographical areas learn about EPA enforcement activities. To accomplish this goal, the appropriate Public Affairs Office should send a press release to the media and interest groups in the affected area, i.e., the local newspaper and other local publications, television and radio stations, and citizen groups. The

headquarters Public Affairs Office, in conjunction with the appropriate regional office, will issue press releases to the national press and major television networks where an EPA enforcement activity has national implications.

## 2. Targeted Trade Press and Mailing Lists

The Agency must also disseminate information about enforcement activities to affected industries. Sending a press release to relevant trade publications and newsletters, particularly for a significant case, will put other potential violators on notice that EPA is enforcing against specific conduct in the industry. It is also useful to follow up such press releases with speeches to industry groups and articles in relevant trade publications, reinforcing the Agency's commitment to compliance.

To ensure the appropriate distribution of publicity, we are requesting each of the regional Public Affairs Offices, in cooperation with the Regional Counsels and regional program offices, to establish or review and update their mailing lists of print media, radio and television stations, state and local officials, trade publications, and business and industry groups for each of the enforcement programs conducted in the Regions.

## E. Use of Publicity Other Than Press Releases

EPA headquarters and regional offices have generally relied on press releases to disseminate information on enforcement activities. Other types of enforcement publicity are also appropriate in certain instances.

### 1. Press Conferences and Informal Press Briefings

Press conferences can be a useful device for highlighting an enforcement activity and responding to public concerns in a specific areas. Regional Administrators should consider using press conferences to announce major enforcement actions and to elaborate on important simultaneously issued press releases. Press conferences should also be considered where an existing or potential public hazard is involved. The regional Public Affairs Office should always inform the headquarters Public Affairs Office when it decides to hold a press conference to provide an opportunity for the Administrator's advance knowledge and involvement if necessary.

### 2. Informal Meetings with Constituent Groups

To further supplement EPA efforts to inform the public and regulated community, regional offices should meet often with constituent groups (states, environmental groups, industry, and the press) to brief these groups on recent enforcement developments. These meetings can be organized by the Public Affairs Offices. By informing the public, EPA increases public interest in its enforcement program and thereby encourages compliance.

### 3. Responding to Inaccurate Statements

EPA should selectively respond to incorrect statements made about EPA enforcement activities. For example, EPA may want to respond to an editorial or other article which inaccurately characterizes EPA enforcement at a Superfund site with a "letter to the editor." Where an Agency response is deemed to be appropriate, it should promptly follow the inaccurate statement.

### 4. Articles and Prepared Statements

EPA's Public Affairs Offices and the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Monitoring occasionally prepare articles on various aspects of the Agency's enforcement program. For example, Region I issues a biweekly column to several newspapers in the Region covering timely enforcement issues such as asbestos in schools. We encourage all Regional and Headquarters offices to prepare feature articles on enforcement issues. When the regional office is developing an article on a subject with national implications, it should contact the Headquarters Office of Public Affairs to obtain a possible quote from the Administrator and to discuss whether the article should be expanded to a national perspective. Likewise, appropriate regions should be consulted in the preparation of Headquarters articles or statements which refer to actions of or facilities in particular regions.

### 5. Interviews

In some cases, Headquarters and Regional Public Affairs Offices should consider arranging media interviews with the Regional Administrator, Deputy Administrator, the Administrator, or other EPA officials. Such an interview will reflect the Agency's position on a particular enforcement activity or explain EPA's response to an enforcement problem.